

CONFESSIO AMANTIS.
JOHN GOWER.
FOLIO 91. SIGNATURE M 4.
PRINTED AT WESTMINSTER
BY
WILLIAM CAXTON
1483

1483

10

No. Q. 402.25



*Bought with the
Charlotte Harris Fund
Charlestown Branch.*

May 14, 1920

B

But yf ony other Wold
 She sayth that hyr self she shold
 Doo wreche With hyr owne hond
 Thorough oute the Wold in euery lode
 That euery yf therof shal speke
 Hou the hyr self it shold wreke
 She wepeth she cryeth she swooneth oft
 She cast hyr eyen vp alofte
 And sayd among ful pywussly
 A god thou Wolt Wel it am I
 For Jphis is thus bysen
 Ordene so that many may seyn
 A thousand Wynter after this
 Hou such a mayden dyd amys
 And so as I dyddo to me
 For I ne dyde noo pyte
 To hym Whiche for my loue is loue
 Doo no pyte to me therfore
 And With this word she felle to ground
 A swoune e there she lay askound
 The goddes Whiche her pleyntes herde
 And saide hou wofully she ferde
 Here yf a wey they took anone
 And shopen here in to a stone
 After the forme of hyr ymage
 Of body bothe e of visage
 And for the meruaylle of this ymage
 Conto the place am the kyng
 And eke the quene e many mo
 And When they Wyten it Was soo
 As I haue told it here aboue
 Hou that Jphys Was dede for loue
 Of that he had be refused
 They helde al men excused
 And Wondren vpon the vengeaunce
 And for to kepe remembraunce
 This fayre ymage mayden lyche
 With compagne noble e ryche
 With torches e With grete solempnyte
 To Salampne the Cyte
 They led e carre forth With all
 This dede corps e seyn it shal
 Besyde thyllk Image haue
 His sepulture e be begraue
 This corps e this Image thus
 In to the Cyte to Venus

Where that goddesse her Temple had
 To geare bothe forth they lad
 Thyllke Image as for myracle
 Was sette vpon an hyghe pynacle
 That al it myght knowe
 And vnder that they maden lode
 A tombe ryche for the nones
 Of marble e eke of Iaspere stones
 Wheryn this Jphys Was byloken
 That euermore it shal be spoken
 And for men shal the sothe wyte
 They haue here Epytaphe Wryte
 As thyng Whiche shold abyde stable
 The letters grauen in a Table
 Of marble Were e sayd thys
 Here lyth Whiche slouz hym self Jphis
 For loue of Nysarathen
 And in ensample of tho Women
 That suffren men to dyen soo
 His prync a man may seyn also
 For it is brened fleshe e bone
 In the figure of a stone
 He Was to nesse e the hard
 Beware for thy lere afterward
 E men e Women bothe wo
 Ensampleth you of that Was tho
 Soo thus my sone as I the seyn
 It greueth hy dyuers Were
 In despayr a man to falle
 Whiche is the last braunche of alle
 Of slouth as thou hast herd deuyse
 Wherof that thou thy self auyse
 Good is or that thou be deuoyed
 Wherof the howe of grace is deuoyed
 My sadre hou so that it stonde
 Nou haue I pleynly vnderstonde
 Of slouthes court the proprete
 Wherof touchend in my degre
 For aier I thynk to be Ware
 But ouer this so as I dare
 With al myn lert^r I polly bysecke
 That ye me Wold enforme e tect
 What there is more of youre aprysse
 In loue als Wel as other Wyle
 So that I may me cleue thyrus
 Confessor

My sonne Whyle thou art alpye
 And hast also thy ful mynde
 Among the vyces Whiche I fynde
 There is yet one such of the seuene
 Whiche al this World hath set vneue
 And causeth many tymes Wrong
 Where he the cause hath vnderfong
 Whereof here after thou shalt here
 The forme both e the matere

Explicit Liber Quartus

Yest When the hyghe
 god bega, This World
 and that the kynde of
 man/ Was falle in to
 no grete encrees/ For
 Worldes good/ Was

f
 tho no ptees/ But al Was set to the co
 mune/ They speken than of no fortune
 Or for to lese or for to Wynne
 Eyl Auarice brought Inne
 And þ Was When þ World Was Woꝝe
 Of man of hors of shepe of Oꝝe
 And that men knewen the money
 Tho Went pꝛes oute of the Weye
 And Werre came on euery syde
 Whiche al loue leyd asyde
 And of comon his propre made
 So that in stee of shouel e spade
 The sharp Was take on honde
 And in this Wyse it cam to londe
 Whereof that men made dyches depe
 And hyghe Walles for to kepe
 The gold Whiche auarice enclōseth
 But al to lytel hym supposeth
 Though he myzt al the World purchase
 For that thynge that may embrace
 Of gold of catel or of lond
 Lete it neuer oute of his hond
 But gete hym more e halt it fast
 As though the World sholde euer last
 So is he lyche vñw the selle
 For as these tokes telle
 What cometh ther in lasse or more

Incipit Liber Quintus

o Estat Auaricia nature legis
 et que/ Largus amor poscit stric
 tus illa stat/ Omne q est nimium vi
 ciosum dicitur aurū/ Vellera sicut oues
 seruat auarus opes / Non decet vt soli
 seruabitur os sed amori/ Debet homo so
 lam solus habere suam/

ENGLAND
WESTMINSTER
WILLIAM CAXTON

GOWER, JOHN. *Confessio Amantis*.

1483.

A single leaf.

Hain 7,835.

Printed with Dutch bâtarde type, in two columns, 46 lines in each. A complete copy consists of 211 leaves. The size of the leaf in the Library is 305 X 216 mm.

This leaf contains lines 3613-3712 from the fourth book, and the first 31 lines from the fifth book of the poem. The fragment from the fourth book tells the second half of the story of *Iphis and Araxarethen*; and the opening stanzas of the fifth book are an exhortation against avarice, leading up to the story of *King Midas*.

Iphis, the son of King Theucer, fell in love with "a Maide of lou astat." The girl, however, did not return his emotions and "tok good hiede to save and kepe hir wommanhiede." The young prince was brought to such a despair by her resistance that "he hath lost al his delit of lust, of sleep, of appetit." On a dark night he wandered to the house of the maiden and, after bewailing his tragic lot, hung himself upon the gate-post.

The morwe cam, the nyht is gon,
Men comen out and syhe anon
Wher that this yonge lord was ded:
Ther was an hous withoute red,
For noman knew the cause why;
Ther was wepinge and ther was cry.

Araxarethen, however, knew the cause. She took the guilt of Iphis's death upon herself, and prayed that no pity should be shown to her as she had shown no pity to him. The gods heard her prayer, and changed her into a stone "after the forme of hire image of bodi bothe and of visage." People then carried the dead Iphis to the city and set up the stone image of the maid above his tomb, with an epitaph telling of their fate.

The Confessor, who relates this story, draws the moral that despair is a grievous thing, "the laste branche of all of Slouthes." And the young man, the devotee of love, promises that he will take heed:

Mi will is ferst that thou be schrive;
Now have I pleinty understonde
Of Slouthes court the proprete,
Whereof touchende in my degre
For evere I thenke to be war.

The story is taken from the fourteenth book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, as is the story of Midas from the eleventh.

The *Confessio Amantis* is one of the three main works of John Gower, the other two being the *Speculum Meditantis* and the *Vox Clamantis*. All three works, as seen, have Latin titles, but the works themselves are in three different languages: the *Speculum Meditantis* in French, the *Vox Clamantis* in Latin, and the *Confessio Amantis* in English. John Gower wrote with equal ease in these three languages.

The poem, consisting of thirty thousand lines, was composed at the request of Richard II, probably in 1383 and 1384. Gower was then fifty-six years old, and widely known for his great French and Latin epics. The *Speculum Meditantis* treats of the vices and virtues, seeking to teach the way whereby a sinner ought to return to his Creator. ("Coment l'omme peccheour lessant ses mals se doit reformer a dieu et avoir pardoun par l'eyde de nostre seigneur Jhesu Christ et de sa douce Miere la Vierge gloriose.") The *Vox Clamantis* was suggested by the Jack Straw Rebellion of 1381, pointing out the wrongs suffered by the people, and severely condemning the corruptions of the age. "The morall Gower" — as his friend Chaucer called him — was moved by high purpose in all his writings. It is rather surprising, therefore, to see him in his more advanced years turning to the subject of love.

Forthi the Stile of my writings
Fro this day forth I thenke change
And speke of thing is noght so strange.

Nevertheless, the poet's point of view did not change. Love was his subject, but the old moralist was still in him. He wanted to write

in such a manner wise
Which may be wisdom to the wise,
And play to him that list to play.

The *Confessio Amantis*, like Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, consists of a string of stories. The idea of the confession itself — as modern editors, especially G. C. Macaulay, remind us — was taken from the *Roman de la Rose*, where also Genius, the priest of Nature, hears the confession. Similarly, in Gower's poem, the young lover went to the woods, imploring, amidst tears, the help of Venus. The Queen of Love was gracious. After various inquiries as to the experiences of the young man, she spoke:

In aunter if thou live,
Mi will is ferst that thou be schrive;
And natheless how that it is
I wot miself, bot for al this
Unto my prest, which comth anon,
I woll thou telle it on and on,
Bothe all thi thought and all thi werk.

The worthy priest appeared and the lover's confession began, going "on and on," as Venus desired it.

The stories related by the Confessor — whether the young lover knew it or not — were not original. Most of them were borrowed from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and the others from the Bible, from various Latin poets, and some from Boccaccio. Yet they are arranged in an excellent frame-work to illustrate the seven deadly sins — pride, envy, wrath, sloth, avarice, gluttony, and unlawful love. All the *nuances* of these sins are demonstrated. The first book, dedicated to pride, for example, tells stories about hypocrisy, disobedience, presumption, boasting, and vainglory.

Gower's style is plain, lacking in dramatic power or humor; yet it is interesting. His language is forceful and his octosyllabic verse flows easily. Naturally, in a work of such magnitude, there are bound to be many prosaic passages. But it is not necessary to dwell here upon the merits and shortcomings of John Gower. Once he was looked upon as the equal of Chaucer, an exaggeration which inevitably led to a reaction of neglect. Gower was no rival to Chaucer; but modern critics justly regard him as a great craftsman and one of the outstanding masters of the Anglo-Norman phase of English literature.

A large number of existing early manuscripts testify to the unusual popularity of the *Confessio Amantis* during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Caxton printed it in 1483, basing his text on three different versions. In 1532 Thomas Berthelet reprinted Caxton's volume, emending it from the readings of his own manuscript. In 1554 he republished this same edition. The Boston Public Library has a beautiful copy of this second Berthelet edition, belonging to the Barton Collection.

The leaf was bought in May 1920.

seigneur Jhesu Christ et de sa douce Miere la Vierge gloriose") The *Vox Clamantis* was suggested by the Jack Straw Rebellion of 1381, pointing out the wrongs suffered by the people, and severely condemning the corruptions of the age. "The morall Gower" — as his friend Chaucer called him — was moved by high purpose in all his writings. It is rather surprising, therefore, to see him in his more advanced years turning to the subject of love.

Forthi the Stile of my writings
Fro this day forth I thenke change
And speke of thing is noght so strange.

Nevertheless, the poet's point of view did not change. Love was his subject, but the old moralist was still in him. He wanted to write

in such a manner wise
Which may be wisdom to the wise,
And play to him that list to play.

The *Confessio Amantis*, like Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, consists of a string of stories. The idea of the confession itself — as modern editors, especially G. C. Macaulay, remind us — was taken from the *Roman de la Rose*, where also Genius, the priest of Nature, hears the confession. Similarly, in Gower's poem, the young lover went to the woods, imploring, amidst tears, the help of Venus. The Queen of Love was gracious. After various inquiries as to the experiences of the young man, she spoke:

In aunter if thou live,
Mi will is ferst that thou be shrive;
And natheless how that it is
I wot miself, bot for al this
Unto my prest, which comth anon,
I woll thou telle it on and on,
Bothe all thi thought and all thi werk.

The worthy priest appeared and the lover's confession began, going "on and on," as Venus desired it,

16

well.

present volume was written in April 1444; the last in January 1463.

Jan Veldener, the printer of the book, was a native of Würzburg. He began printing at Louvain in 1473, working there for four years. Though an excellent craftsman, he did not seem to have much luck, especially after Johann de Westfalia opened his shop in the same city. In 1477 Veldener moved to Utrecht, and from there to the neighboring Kuilenburg, where he remained active till 1484.

Thomas Prince's copy.

ENGLAND

WESTMINSTER

WILLIAM CAXTON

GOWER, JOHN. *Confessio Amantis*.

1483.

A single leaf.

Hain 7,835.

Printed with Dutch bâtarde type, in two columns, 46 lines in each. A complete copy consists of 211 leaves. The size of the leaf in the Library is 305 × 216 mm.

This leaf contains lines 3613-3712 from the fourth book, and the first 31 lines from the fifth book of the poem. The fragment from the fourth book tells the second half of the story of *Iphis and Araxarethen*; and the opening stanzas of the fifth book are an exhortation against avarice, leading up to the story of *King Midas*.

Iphis, the son of King Theucer, fell in love with "a Maide of lou astat." The girl, however, did not return his emotions and "tok good hiede to save and kepe hir wommanhiede." The young prince was brought to such a despair by her resistance that "he hath lost al his delit of lust, of sleep, of appetit." On a dark night he wandered to the house of the maiden and, after bewailing his tragic lot, hung himself upon the gate-post.

The morwe cam, the nyte is gon,
Men comen out and syhe anon
Wher that this yonge lord was ded:
Ther was an hous withoute red,
For noman knew the cause why;
Ther was wepinge and ther was cry.

Araxarethen, however, knew the cause. She took the guilt of Iphis's death upon herself, and prayed that no pity should be shown to her as she had shown no pity to him. The gods heard her prayer, and changed her into a stone "after the forme of hire image of bodi bothe and of visage." People then carried the dead Iphis to the city and set up the stone image of the maid above his tomb, with an epitaph telling of their fate.

The Confessor, who relates this story, draws the moral that despair is a grievous thing, "the laste branche of all of Slouthe." And the young man, the devotee of love, promises that he will take heed:

2

15

fourth of .ix. as this yggure is weig.

What these
accordes were
foudey pidaogo
as pat hemyna
mes. And so þ
he called in nō
bre double / he
called in low
nes Dyapalou
And þ he called
in nōbre othe
halfe he called
in lowne Dya
pente. And þ þ
in nōbre is cal
led all e þ thyr
de dele / here in lowne Dyapalou / e
that þ in nombres is called all e the
eghteth dele / here in lowne double
Dyapalou. As in melodye of one strē
as is the stryng he stremeth enloure

contra Ruf. Many of Pythagoras dy
ciples kepte her maylres heestes in
mynde and bled her wytte and myn
de to studye of bookes / and taught
that many such prouerbes shall byte
te and departe sorowe from the bo
dye / vncomynge from the wytte / les
cherpe from the wombe / treason oute
of the Lyte / styffe oute of the hous.
Incontynence and hastynesse oute of
all thynges. Also all that frendes ha
ue shall be comyn. A frende is the o
ther of tweyne. We must take hede
of tymes. After god sothnesse shall
be woilhypped that maketh men be
next god. (Pydonus libro octauo ca
pitulo sexto.)

Capit

.xii.

